DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 215 IR 003 991

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TITLE Public Libraries and the Planning Process: In Search of Goals, Objectives, and Priorities.
PUB DATE 20 Jul 76
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the American Library Association Annual Conference (95th, Chicago, Illinois, July 18-24, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Information Services; Library Planning; Library Programs; Library Services; *Models; *Public Libraries; *Public Relations; Systems Approach
IDENTIFIERS ALA 76

ABSTRACT

A velcro board presentation of an input-output model, illustrating the public library as a community information system, can be used to define the library to citizen taxpayers. The major input to the system is tax dollars and its basic components are librarians, recorded information, facilities, and equipment. The output depends on the library's purposes, which must be defined and prioritized through library-citizen interaction. The library can be passive, letting output occur through the initiation of motivated citizens; or it can be active, generating programs aimed at meeting citizen needs and attacking local problems. (KB)

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PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE PLANNING PROCESS: IN SEARCH OF GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND PRIORITIES

Presentation by Edward N. Howard, Director
Vigo County Public Library
ALA, Chicago, 20 July 1976

I believe that the public library must be defined to the citizen taxpayers. In order to do this, we must know and be able to show how it works, and for this we need a model.

I use the systems approach and a simple input-output model, which illustrates the public library as a community information system. Here now is a short version of a Velcro Board presentation that I have been making to service clubs in Terre Haute.

The major INPUT to the system is tax $, and its basic components are these:

LIBRARIANS--this includes all persons employed by the library.

INFORMATION--this encompasses all recorded information: books, audio & video tapes, films, reports, minutes, clippings, etc.

FACILITIES--the physical structures that house the other components.

EQUIPMENT--although this covers all equipment and furnishings, my particular emphasis is on the portable equipment that must be easily available to the citizen taxpayer, available for use anywhere, anytime, without hassle, and without fees, fines or any other form of double taxation.

The OUTPUT of the system is indicated in our model by a ? mark.

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Now let's make it a working model by adding a LIBRARIAN (figure), a bit of INFORMATION (reel of film), and a piece of EQUIPMENT (magic lantern projector).

Now let's add the most important element to our model, CITIZEN TAXPAYERS. This is the part that seems to be overlooked in most library planning.

As is evident from our model, there can be no output unless the citizen comes into contact with the system! This contact, what systems people call an interface, occurs whenever the citizen comes to the library facility for whatever purpose, or whenever a librarian, information, or equipment goes out to the citizen by whatever means.

The quantity of contacts and the degree of satisfaction they give is known and remembered by each citizen. Yes, each citizen knows!

We do not know what the citizens know, but as system operators we can measure and evaluate enough of the output over a period of time to provide comparative data for management decision-making.

A system is designed for a PURPOSE. The electric toaster, for example, is designed to toast bread. Plug it into its 110V input, drop in the bread, and push down the lever. If it is performing well, the toast comes out just as you like it. But it you did not know what it was designed for, i.e., its purpose, you'd probably never use it.

The library as a system must have a clear and practical purpose that is easily grasped by the average citizen, a purpose that aims to affect directly the lives of the citizens and their community. This statement of purpose must have total agreement by the senior staff and the library board, and have general acceptance, at the very least, by the rest of the staff and the citizens of the community.

Our model compels us to look outside the library facility and to consider the needs of the multitude of citizens. And when we sift out just the information-based needs of these citizen taxpayers, we see how overwhelmingly the needs exceed the output capability of our "community information system."

If we are to have any significant impact on the community, some preferential order has to be assigned. PRIORITIES are essential as guidelines for the allocation of the input $, so that we will spread the $ across the components of the system to get specified outputs, providing concentrations of materials and services in a way that will return measurable benefits to the citizens.

Part of the system can operate in a passive mode, like a voice-activated recorder, with output occurring through the initiative of citizens who are self-motivated to come to the library facility.

But the library as community information system with purpose and priorities is an active system, and an active system generates programs and projects aimed at meeting specific citizen needs and attacking major community problems:

These programs and projects require OBJECTIVES. Objectives are intended to affect something outside the system itself. Objectives state what is going to be done to or for whom, and for what purpose or with what expected results.

Purpose, priorities, and objectives exact a price in sweat and tears, and sometimes blood. But the price for operating without purpose, priorities, and objectives is much, much higher.

pLA

Resource Personnel
for
PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE PLANNING PROCESS --
In Search of Goals, Objectives and Priorities

Session #2

NOTE: The names below will provide you with after-Conference contacts on the subject matter of this Session. They may also be able to refer you to further readings and to other people who are knowledgeable about this complex topic of planning.

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PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THE PLANNING PROCESS --
In Search of Goals, Objectives and Priorities;
Some Selected Readings for Program Session #2

July 20, 1976

SESSION THEME: The whys and hows of library planning, including goal-setting and the critical need to establish priorities in a changing society.

Blasingame, Ralph and Mary Jo Lynch
Design for Diversity: Alternatives to Standards for Public Libraries. PLA Newsletter 13 (June 1974) 4-22.

Stressing community uniqueness (in demography; in educational, information, cultural and other service needs; in area availability of library resources), Blasingame and Lynch stress the need to design public library programs according to diverse organizational patterns, not via a monolithic or standards model. (See also Meredith Bloss's article *"Standards for Public Library Service -- Quo Vadis."* Library Journal 101 (June 1, 1976) 1259-1262.

Bone, Larry Earl
The Public Library Goals and Objectives Movement: Death Gasp or Renaissance? Library Journal 100 (July 1975) 1283-1288.

1974 study of selected large public libraries and their varying approaches to goal-setting; includes discussion of obstacles, differing professional commitments, and the dynamic factors which enhance or diminish the planning process. (See also Bone's full report to the Council on Library Resources *"The Goals and Objectives Experience."* 60 pp. 1975. Available as ERIC ED 105 873).

Howard, Edward N.
Toward PPBS in the Public Library. American Libraries 2 (April 1971) 386-393.

One director's attempt to apply PPBS guidelines to a medium-sized public library system (Vigo County, Ind.) and the process used to determine revised priorities.

Drucker, Peter F.
Managing the Public Service Institution. The Public Interest 33 (Fall 1973) 43-60.

Renowned business consultant stresses the need for sound management principles among schools, universities and other "public service institutions"; libraries, too, can profit from his analysis and advice.

Warncke, Ruth
Planning Library Workshops and Institutes. Chicago, American Library Association, 1976 (Public Library Reporter No. 17) $6.50.

See especially chapter 4 *"Objectives"* which clearly defines and analyzes the goal-setting process; differentiates between library goals and objectives; emphasizes the need to identify, articulate, prioritize, use, and then measure the effectiveness of the objectives which have been selected. A practical and useful analysis.

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